

knowing the answer to that question, I can shape each story in the narrative so that it leads logically and emotionally and psychologically to the conclusion or epiphany or lesson or understanding, or to a clearer future? So at all times I had to hold in my mind both the real meaning of my narrative and the conclusion itself of the narrative—the latter to the extent that I could, bearing in mind that I was learning as I went along, and knew a good deal more about my own life when I finished than I had when I began.

But here is the rub: I was making decisions all the time, on every page, about what to put in and what to leave out, and the very act of doing this, over and over again, with no matter what purity of heart and determination to tell the truth, was a choosing and shaping of what the truth was.

I stuck to the chronology in my journals. I was scrupulous about sticking to the order of events, about relating them as they were recorded in my journals and as I remembered them happening. But I had to build a narrative that led from understanding to understanding, and even in my journals it wasn't possible to make a clear delineation of the way or the order that the understandings had struck me. Sometimes they came like the proverbial anvil falling out of the sky, but more often I'd had inklings for a long time and they grew gradually into fulfillment. So sometimes I had to make things seem as if they were a lot clearer than they actually were.

I wasn't so sure, when I was done, what the truth about my spiritual journey might be and whether or not I'd actually managed to tell it. This was not because of any evil intent of mine, but simply because it is the nature of life, even one's own, to be open to interpretation.

But nonetheless, there's a way in which all nonfiction is fiction: the backward search through happenstance, trivia, the flotsam and jetsam of life to search out a pattern, themes, a meaning is by its nature an imposition of order onto what was chaotic. It's an attempt to give a linearity to events, many psychic, which had no linearity, which, if anything, were a spiral, or had more the hectic quality of a dream. What is true are thoughts, dreams, visions. What may or may not be true are the order and timing of events, the perception and linking of them. If it's true on the one hand that everything is what it seems to be, and I constantly remind myself of this, on the other, there is a way in which it's also true that nothing is. I begin to think like the Bushmen, as Laurens van der Post reports them as believing, that in the beginning a dream was dreaming us, and like Clifton Fadiman who said that the older he gets the more his life seems to him to have been, rather than a series of actual events, one long, interesting dream. In writing what the world will call autobiography, I am torn between the facts and history and the truth of the imagination,

and it is to the latter, finally, in terms of my personal history, that I lean. (Preface)

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JULIA VAN GORDER

Restitution

I read a letter to the editor
 in the Vancouver Sun
 from a grandmother,
 Donna Whitta in Crawford Bay,
 saying she has given it all up—
 a big wooden house
 in the suburbs, a gas-gulping car
 and holidays abroad on planes
 that suck up six gallons a mile.
 Good for you, Donna.

She won't eat strawberries
 in January delivered by diesel truck,
 coffee from Brazil nor bananas
 airlifted from Ecuador.
 She's given up power-driven,
 labour-saving devices, furniture
 made of teak and mahogany
 from ancient Asian forests.
 "You only need one chair,
 locally made, to sit on."
 Right on, Donna.

She realized she has borrowed
 Millions of dollars
 from her children and grandchildren
 limiting their lives.
 She is grievously sorry.
 So am I.

Julia van Gorder's poetry appears earlier in this volume.